

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5770

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Transportation, March 2, 1999

Title: An act relating to coordination of special needs transportation.

Brief Description: Enhancing coordination of special needs transportation.

Sponsors: Senators Gardner, Sellar, Haugen, Goings, Prentice, Horn, Deccio, Oke, Fraser, Loveland, Eide, Costa, Swecker and Rasmussen.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Transportation: 2/18/99, 3/2/99 [DPS].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5770 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Haugen, Chair; Gardner, Vice Chair; Goings, Vice Chair; Benton, Costa, Eide, Heavey, Horn, Jacobsen, Johnson, Morton, Oke, Patterson, Prentice, Sellar, Sheahan, T. Sheldon, Shin and Swecker.

Staff: Gene Baxstrom (786-7303)

Background: Currently there are a number of agencies and programs involved with providing and/or sponsoring transportation services for persons with special needs. At the state level, the Department of Social and Health Services and the Superintendent of Public Instruction play major roles in providing for transportation. At the local level transit agencies, area agencies on aging, senior services and county human services all provide transportation for special needs populations. Transportation provided by an agency or a program is often for selected groups of people which meet specific eligibility requirements for that particular agency or program. This creates a situation in which multiple transportation providers are running duplicate routes serving only their selected population, which can result in costly and inefficient service and reduced service levels or areas.

In 1998, the Legislature created the Agency Council on Coordinated Transportation, declaring its intent to coordinate transportation services and programs which provide those transportation services in order to achieve increased efficiencies and to provide a greater number of persons with special transportation needs.

The council consists of nine voting members and eight nonvoting legislative members. The nine voting members are the Secretary of Transportation, who serves as chair; the Secretary of the Department of Social and Health Services; the Superintendent of Public Instruction; and six members appointed by the Governor, representing consumers of special needs transportation, pupil transportation, the Community Transportation Association of the Northwest, the Community Action Council Association, and the State Transit Association.

The eight nonvoting legislative members include four House members and four Senators, representing each caucus and the Transportation, House Appropriations, and Senate Ways and Means Committees.

The council is responsible for: (1) developing standards and strategies for coordinating special needs transportation; (2) identifying, developing, funding (as resources are available), and monitoring demonstration projects; (3) identifying barriers to coordinated transportation; (4) recommending statutory changes to the Legislature to assist in coordinated transportation; and (5) working with the Office of Financial Management to make necessary changes for identification of transportation costs in executive agency budgets.

The council was directed to report to the Legislature on December 1, 1998, and every two years thereafter on council activities, including results of demonstration projects and associated benefits. The Department of Transportation is to provide support for the council. The council is dissolved on June 30, 2003.

Prior to creation of the council, in the 1997-99 transportation budget, \$1 million was appropriated to the Department of Transportation for grants to facilitate and demonstrate cooperation among transportation providers. Prior to the council, this effort was administered by a group appointed by the Secretary of Transportation, which mirrored the council. In 1997, grants were made to five local and private nonprofit agencies for six different contracts. The department provided updates on these projects as part of its December, 1998 update.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The Agency Council on Coordinated Transportation is modified to provide voting status to the eight legislative members. Three-year terms are specified for gubernatorial appointees to the council, and rules governing the council chair and vice-chair are set forth. Council duties are expanded to include administration of the program, managing grants, and providing assistance to local efforts. The sunset date for the council and its powers is extended from June 30, 2003 to June 30, 2007.

The council is directed to develop a process for working with local agencies to convene local forums to address coordination issues, provide a forum to address state coordination efforts, evaluate facility siting impacts, measure performance, provide staff and information support to stakeholders and advocate for persons with special transportation needs.

Local county governments selected by the council are required at the direction of the council to convene local planning forums to address coordination roles and responsibilities. The forums are to develop and implement such plans.

Persons with special needs and special needs coordinated transportation are defined and objectives for the program for agency coordinated transportation are set forth.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The requirement that counties convene local forums is changed to make those forums discretionary. A service user can serve on the council. Numerous references are clarified.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 15, 1999.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: Improved coordination for special needs transportation is beneficial to those being served. It can both improve services and better utilize resources. This bill outlines goals for a statewide program and begins the implementation process.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: PRO: Senator Gardner, prime sponsor; Jeanne Ward, DOT, ACCT; Bruce Reeves, Senior Citizens Lobby; Mike Harbour, WA State Transit Assn., ACCT; Roger Eastman, OSPI; Joe Whaley; Fred Stoffer, Community Transportation NW; Dave O'Connell, Mason Transit; Marcy Jaffe, Olympic Area Agency on Aging; Doug Nelson, Public School Employees (with amendments); Nancy Hanna, DCTED (with amendments).